

BIOTERRORISM:  
**BOTULISM**

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

## TACTICS AGAINST TERRORISM: **BOTULISM**

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control  
Office of Public Health Preparedness



## **What is bioterrorism?**

Bioterrorism is the intentional use of bacteria, viruses, or natural toxins (poisons) as weapons to kill, injure or produce disease in humans, animals or plants. Terrorists may use such an attack to create fear, disrupt the economy, or to get a response from the government.

## What is botulism?

Botulism is a rare but serious disease caused by a toxin produced by bacteria. It is the same bacteria that cause food poisoning. Botulism can cause your muscles to become paralyzed and in some cases it can cause death.

## Types of botulism

Foodborne botulism comes from eating food that contains botulism toxin. It can cause illness within hours or days. People of all ages can get botulism. Foodborne botulism is a public health emergency because many people can become sick at one time.

Infant botulism occurs in babies who eat something that has botulism bacteria. The bacteria produce botulism toxin once inside the baby's intestines.

Wound botulism occurs when wounds are infected with botulism bacteria. The bacteria produce the botulism toxin, which can cause illness. Injecting certain illegal drugs can also cause wound botulism.

## Is botulism contagious?

- Botulism is not spread from one person to another.
- Botulism toxin can be used as a weapon by terrorists.

DHEC and other public health agencies consider botulism to be a high-priority agent that could pose a serious risk to our health and national security. It can be easily produced, cause serious illness and death, and require a special response by public health organizations.

## How botulism can be used for terrorism

Terrorists can use botulism toxin as a weapon to strike many people at one time. Botulism toxin can be spread to people in three ways:

- It can be released into the air.
- It can be added to food.
- It can be added to a source of water.

## Symptoms of botulism

- Double vision
- Blurred vision
- Drooping eyelids
- Slurred speech
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness starting with the shoulders and moving down the body

## Symptoms of botulism in infants

*(12 months old or younger)*

- Will not eat
- Constipation
- Weak cry
- Poor muscle tone

You can have symptoms as soon as six hours after contact with botulism or as late as 10 days. With botulism from food, symptoms usually begin within 12 to 48 hours.

If botulism is not treated, the symptoms may get worse. The arms, legs, body and lungs might be paralyzed. If the lungs become paralyzed, you could stop breathing and die.

## Treatment

If you get botulism, you should see a doctor right away. Doctors can prescribe medicines for adults and infants that will help stop botulism sickness.

Botulism can cause your muscles to become paralyzed. In the worst cases, botulism can paralyze the lungs. You would need a breathing machine to survive. After several weeks of medical care, the paralysis usually goes away.

If you get botulism from an infected wound, a doctor might have to perform surgery to remove the bacteria. Patients who survive botulism poisoning might have lifelong problems. This includes tiredness and shortness of breath. Long-term medical care may be needed.

## How to protect yourself and others

If you become infected with botulism, you should call your doctor immediately. In turn, your doctor will contact DHEC. If there is a botulism outbreak in your community, DHEC and other agencies will provide additional protective information through local radio and TV stations.

### Foodborne botulism

- Avoid food contamination. All home-canned foods – but especially asparagus, green beans, beets and corn – should be prepared in a clean work area and properly labeled and dated. High temperatures destroy botulism toxin. Consider boiling home-canned foods for 10 minutes to ensure destruction of the botulism toxin before eating.
- Keep garlic or herbs that are bottled in oil in the refrigerator.
- Keep baked potatoes hot until you serve them. If you are not eating right away, put them in the refrigerator.

### Infant botulism

Infants younger than 12 months old should not be fed honey. Honey has been identified as a potential source of botulism in infants.

### Wound botulism

- See a doctor immediately if you have an infected wound.
- Don't use illegal drugs injected with a needle.

## What's being done to protect you

- The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) keep constant watch for cases of botulism. Hospitals and doctors are required by law to report every case of botulism to the local health department immediately. If there is a possible botulism outbreak, DHEC and the CDC will investigate its cause to help prevent others from getting the disease.
- Local and federal law enforcement guard community water sources.
- Your doctor can talk to experts at DHEC and the CDC about botulism 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- The CDC has medicine to treat botulism. If you need the medicine, it will be made available to you quickly.

If there is a terrorist event using botulism, local and state law enforcement and health agencies will provide additional instructions for protecting yourself.

## Numbers to know

<b>Emergencies:</b>	<b>9-1-1</b>
<b>Palmetto Poison Control Center:</b>	<b>(800) 222-1222</b>
<b>CDC:</b>	<b>(888) 232-4636</b>
<b>S.C. DHEC:</b> (During normal business hours)	<b>(803) 898-3242</b>

## For more information

### **S.C. DHEC**

<http://www.scdhec.gov>

### **DHEC's Office of Public Health Preparedness**

<http://www.scdhec.net/administration/ophp/tactics.htm>

### **DHEC's Health Alert Network**

<http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/han/notifications.htm>

### **DHEC's List of Reportable Conditions**

[http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/docs/reportable\\_conditions.pdf](http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/docs/reportable_conditions.pdf)

### **US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov>

### **USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service**

<http://www.fsis.usda.gov>

The phone numbers for reporting cases or possible cases of bioterrorism to your local public health department and the DHEC Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology are available at: [http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/docs/reportable\\_conditions.pdf](http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/docs/reportable_conditions.pdf)

*This publication provides health information for your general knowledge. Talk to your doctor about your concerns about any medical condition. DHEC does not recommend you diagnose or treat yourself for a serious illness.*

### Notes:











SOUTH CAROLINA

**Tactics  
Against  
Terrorism**

**Be Safe. Be Smart.**